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DOCTOR STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
DEATH AT THE DWELLER'S COMMAND!
COLAN/WIACEK

Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

Stan Lee Presents: Dr. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

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OF KNIGHTS... AND PAWNS

FOR MONTHS, THE STONE FRAGMENTS OF WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN THE FLESH-AND-BLOOD BODY OF DANE WHITMAN, THE BLACK KNIGHT--
--HAVE LAIN UNDISTURBED ON A SUB-LEVEL OF AVENGERS' MANSION, AS COLD AND UNYIELDING AS THE MADDENING MYSTERY THEY PORTEND.
A MYSTERY WHICH MAY DEFY SOLUTION EVEN BY THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, DOCTOR STRANGE.

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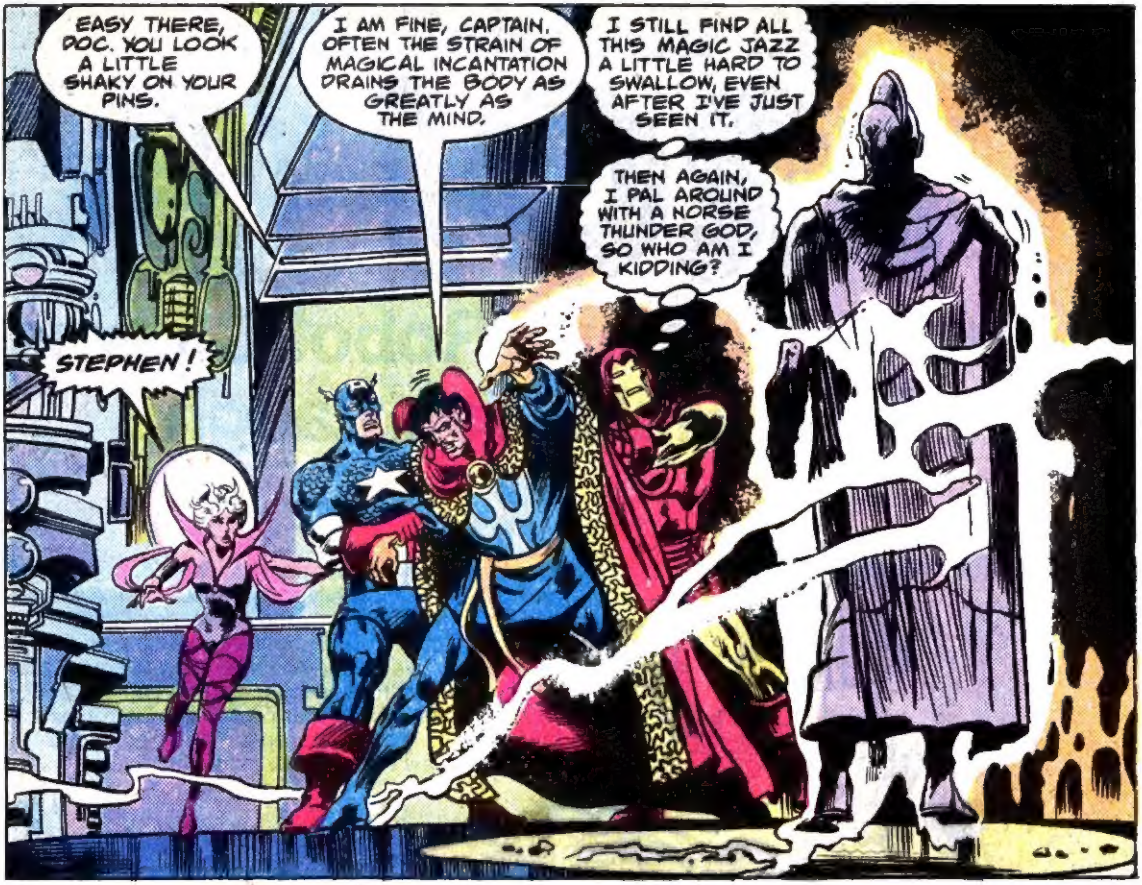
THANKS FOR RESPONDING TO OUR CALL, DOCTOR.* AS HANK SAID, THE STATUE WAS MYSTERIOUSLY ANIMATED--
*DOCTOR STRANGE #29--AL
--ALLOWING IT TO WALK HERE FROM YOUR BASEMENT, SEEKING VENGEANCE ON US FOR ABANDONING IT--UNTIL THE VISION SHATTERED IT.*
I SEE.
*AVENGERS #157 --AL AGAIN.
PERHAPS IF YOU COULD REASSEMBLE IT, WE'D BE GIVEN SOME CLUE AS TO THE POWER BEHIND IT.
I WILL TRY, CAPTAIN.
STAND BACK, MY FRIENDS, THIS ROOM WILL SOON SWIRL WITH FORCES BEYOND YOUR KEN.
LET THE ALL-SEEING EYE COME FORTH--
--AND REVERSE THE ENDLESS FLOW OF TIME.
AS AGAMOTTO GRANTS THIS REQUEST..
--AND BIDS YON STATUE ARISE. ARISE!
LIKE ARCANE PUZZLE PIECES, THE STONY SEGMENTS QUIVER AND QUAKE, MOVING SLOWLY CLOSER AS EACH FRAGMENT SILENTLY SEEKS ITS PROPER PLACE.
AND WHEN ALL IS AS IT WAS...
...THE MYSTIC MASTER LEVITATES THE GRANITE-GRAY FIGURE WHOSE CHISELED COUNTENANCE REMINDS HIM OF THINGS PAST.

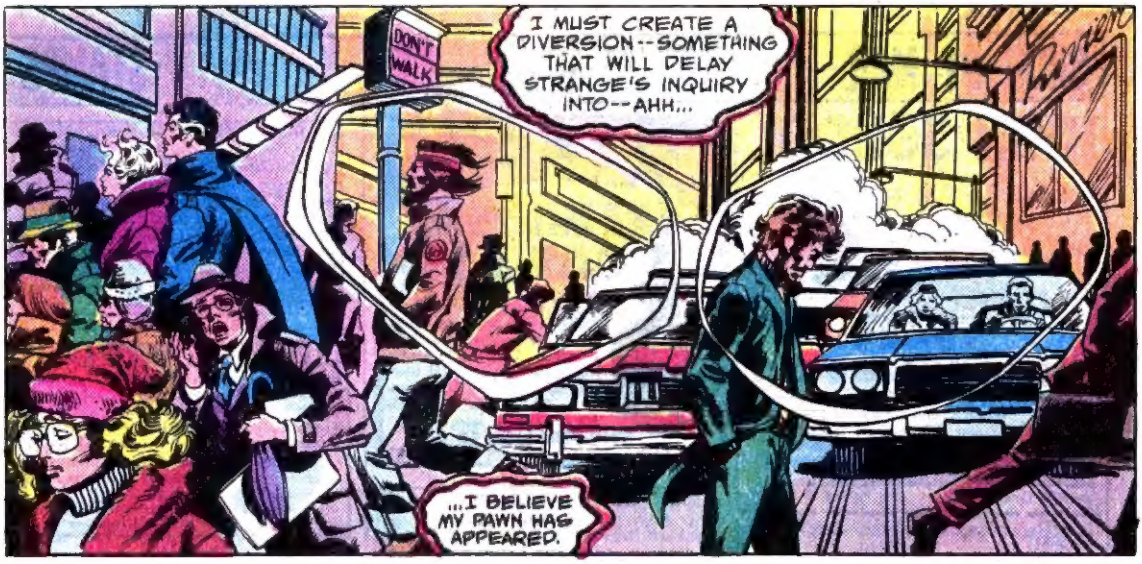

EASY THERE, DOC. YOU LOOK A LITTLE SHAKY ON YOUR PINS.
I AM FINE, CAPTAIN. OFTEN THE STRAIN OF MAGICAL INCANTATION DRAINS THE BODY AS GREATLY AS THE MIND.
I STILL FIND ALL THIS MAGIC JAZZ A LITTLE HARD TO SWALLOW, EVEN AFTER I'VE JUST SEEN IT.
THEN AGAIN, I PAL AROUND WITH A NORSE THUNDER GOD, SO WHO AM I KIDDING?
STEPHEN!

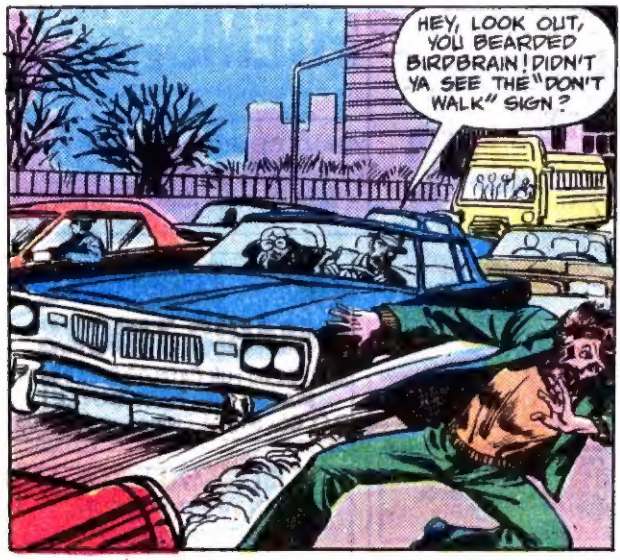
THERE IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS RESTRUCTURED STATUE. SOMETHING IS EITHER MISSING OR HAS BEEN ADDED TO IT.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WE ALL KNOW THE BLACK KNIGHT HAD A SWORD.
WAIT! A SWORD--BUT THAT'S UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE!

YES,,AND IT IS CURRENTLY IN HIS POSSESSION, OR SHOULD BE, BACK IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY--
--WHERE DANE WHITMAN NOW RESIDES AT HIS OWN REQUEST.
GENTLEMEN, THIS STATUE SHOULD HAVE NO BLADE.

BUT, STEPHEN, HOW CAN YOU BE CERTAIN THIS IS THE BLACK KNIGHT'S OWN SWORD--
--AND NOT MERELY A RECENTLY ADDED DUPLICATE?
THE LADY'S GOT SOMETHING THERE, DOC. DECEPTIONS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO OCCUR EVEN AT AVENGERS' H.Q.
A POINT WELL TAKEN, I'M CERTAIN WE'LL BE MORE ENLIGHTENED ONCE I ASCERTAIN THE WEAPON'S COMPOSITION.
AND, IN THIS INSTANCE...
...PHYSICAL FORCE WILL SERVE AS HANDILY AS MYSTICAL MIGHT--
--IN DETERMINING IF THIS IS A CLEVER SUBSTITUTION...
CLANG!
...OR THE ONE, TRUE EBONY BLADE OF ANTIQUITY.
WHATEVER IT IS, I THINK THIS MYSTERY'S A BIT MORE IN YOUR BALLPARK THAN OURS, DOCTOR STRANGE.
I QUITE AGREE. AND WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I'D LIKE TO RETAIN THIS SWORD FOR STUDY AT MY SANCTUM.
ALTHOUGH I SEE NO REASON WHY THE STATUE ITSELF MAY NOT REMAIN HERE FOR THE TIME BEING.

FAREWELL THEN, AVENGERS. AS SOON AS I HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING, YOU WILL KNOW.
OKAY, DOC. WE'LL KEEP AN EYE ON THAT STATUE FOR YOU. STAY IN TOUCH.
TURNING AWAY FROM THE FOLIAGE-FLANKED DOORWAY, DOCTOR STRANGE MAKES A CASUAL PASS...
...AND, SECONDS LATER, THE MASTER MAGE AND HIS MISTRESS STAND AS INCONSPICUOUSLY ATTIRED AS ANY OF THE OTHER FIFTH AVENUE STROLLERS.
CLEA, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE IMPLICATIONS IF THIS IS INDEED THE BLACK KNIGHT'S SWORD?
NO, DARLING.
PERHAPS IT WAS WRENCHED FROM HIS GRASP WHILE HE WAS IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE, LEAVING HIM DEFENSELESS.
DANE WHITMAN WAS MY FRIEND--AND FOR ALL I KNOW, HE MAY BE DYING NOW.
IF NECESSARY, I SHALL TRAVERSE TIME ITSELF TO SEE WHAT HAS OCCURRED... AND IF HE STILL LIVES.
TAXI
WHILE DEEP WITHIN THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS' DOMAIN...
NO! STRANGE IS THE ONE HUMAN ENTITY WHO MAY PROVE A THREAT TO MY PLANS.
THOUGH, AS YET, HE IS UNAWARE OF THE SUBTLE MACHINATIONS I HAVE SET IN MOTION--
--SHOULD HE PROBE THE BYWAYS OF TIME, THE MEDDLING MAGICIAN COULD WELL UNCOVER MY INFLUENCE.
THIS MUST NOT BE.


DON'T WALK
I MUST CREATE A DIVERSION--SOMETHING THAT WILL DELAY STRANGE'S INQUIRY INTO--AHH...
...I BELIEVE MY PAWN HAS APPEARED.


HEY, LOOK OUT, YOU BEARDED BIRDBRAIN! DIDN'T YA SEE THE "DON'T WALK" SIGN?

AWW, GOWAN BACK TO JERSEY BEFORE YOU KILL SOMEBODY!

WHEW! I REALLY ALMOST BOUGHT IT THAT TIME. LOOK AT ME, I'M SHAKING LIKE A LEAF.
I HAVEN'T BEEN SO SCARED SINCE I WAS A KID.

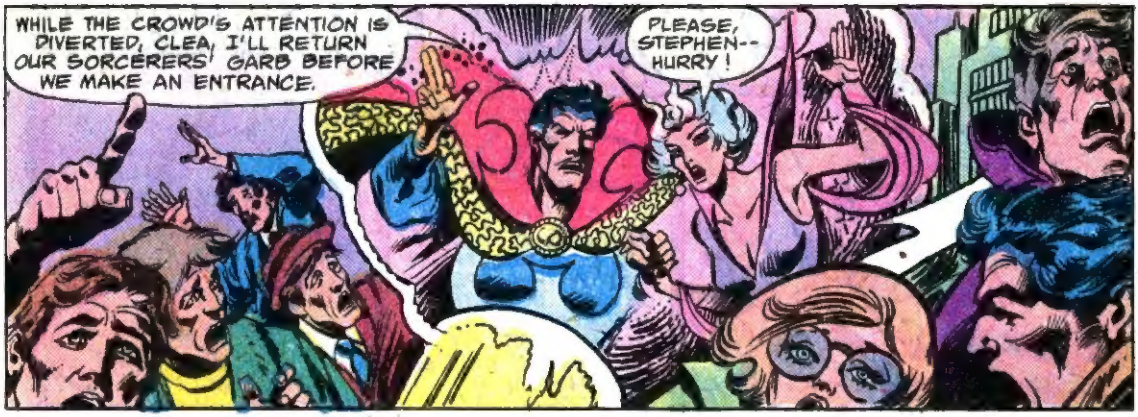
YOU MUST NOT FEAR DEATH'S COMING.
HUH? SOME VOICE INSIDE MY HEAD.

IF YOU DIE FOR ME...

...YOU WILL LIVE FOREVER.
FOREVER.
FOREVER.

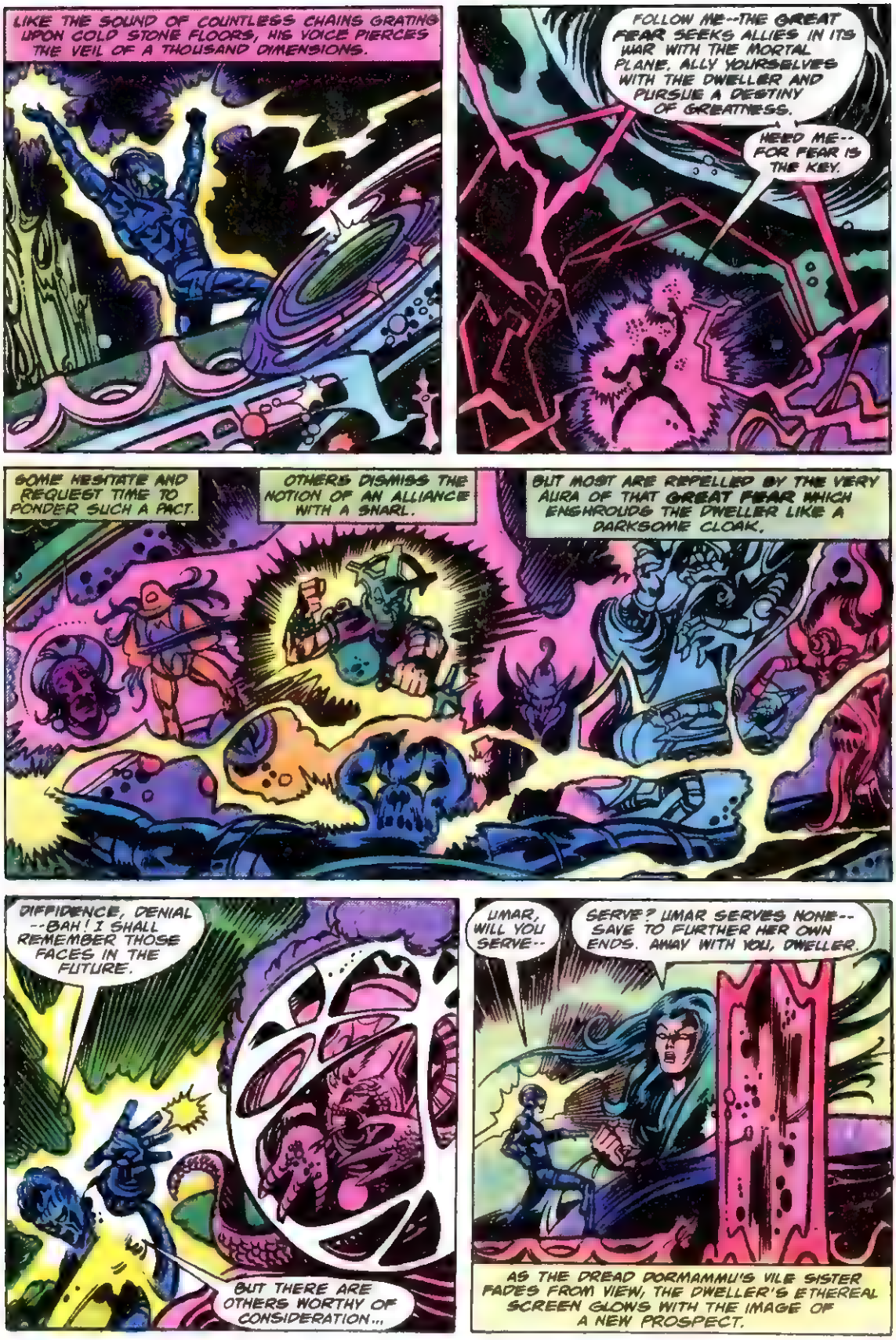
YES, I-SEE-NOW, TO-DIE-FOR-THE-DWELLER-IS-TO-LIVE-FOREVER.
HOT DOGS
ICE CREAM
TACOS

FOOLS! YOU CANNOT DENY THE DWELLER HIS DUE. HIS WILL BE DONE--AWAY WITH YOU!
HOT DOGS
WITH MANIACAL GLEE, THE CACKLING THRALL ROUGHLY YANKS THE PROPANE GAS VALVE OPEN.
DEATH--DEATH AS THE DWELLER DECREES.
FWOOSH!
GAS
AND THE RESULT...
KA-BOOM!
BETTER RUN FOR IT, MISTER. SOME LUNATIC JUST BLEW HIMSELF TO BITS--AND TOOK ABOUT FOUR HUNDRED FRANKS WITH HIM!
VIPERS OF YALTOOR! ARE MY EYES PLAYING TRICKS OR--NO! THERE LOOMING IN THE SMOKE...
...A SHAPE--A FIGURE OF SOME SORT. IT'S INDISTINCT, BUT GROWING ENORMOUSLY FAST.


WHILE THE CROWD'S ATTENTION IS DIVERTED, CLEA, I'LL RETURN OUR SORCERERS' GARB BEFORE WE MAKE AN ENTRANCE.
PLEASE, STEPHEN-- HURRY!

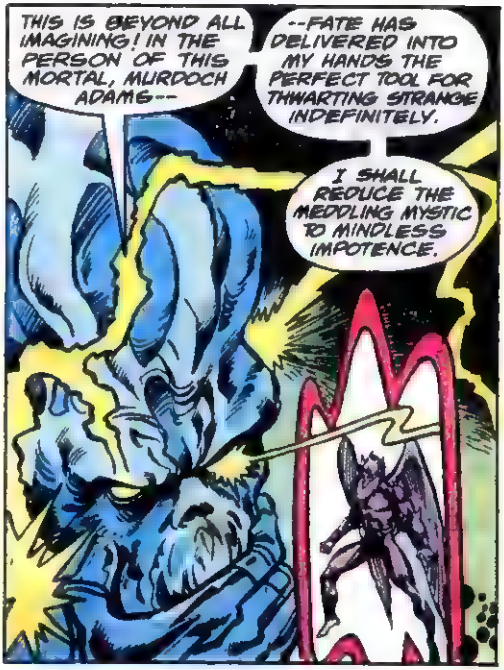
IS IT MERE CHANCE, OR DOES THIS CREATURE HAVE SOME MALICIOUS CONNECTION WITH THE UNKNOWN ENEMY WHO SET THE DREAM WEAVER UPON US?
ARE WE BEING ACCOSTED FROM AFAR? WHAT PURPOSE DO THESE ENDLESS CONFLICTS SERVE?
STEPHEN LOOKS TROUBLED-- UNSURE, AS IF HIS HEART WERE NOT IN THE BATTLE.

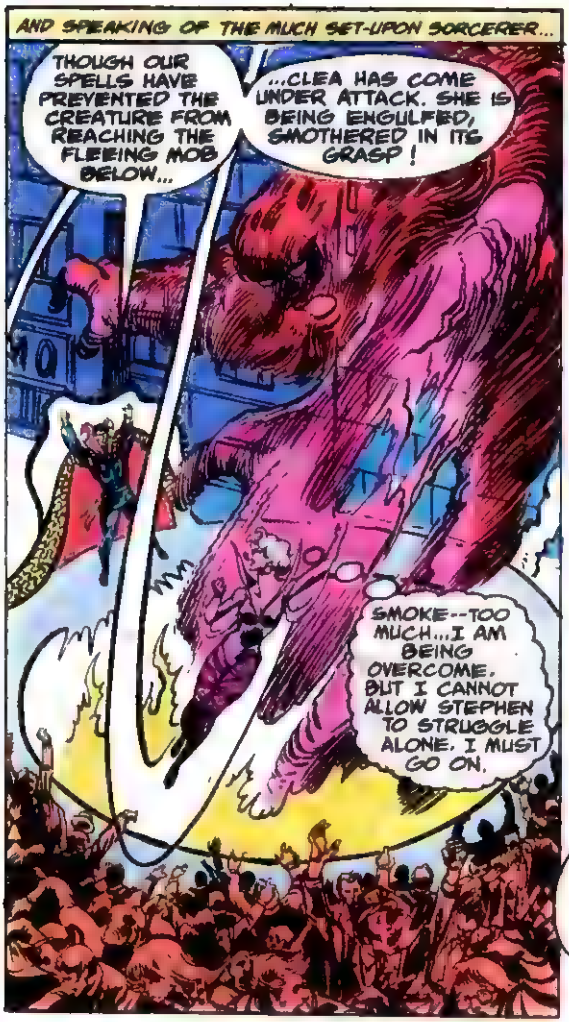
I DISLIKE DISPLAYING OUR POWERS IN PUBLIC VIEW, CLEA.
THOUGH WE HAVE BEEN LEFT WITH LITTLE CHOICE, THE REPERCUSSIONS HAVE ALWAYS PROVEN UNPLEASANT IN THE PAST.
YET, PERHAPS OUR HIDDEN ANTAGONIST WISHES THIS--TO TURN OUR MINDS FROM THE TRUE MENACE HE POSES.
STRANGE'S PERCEPTIONS MARK HIM AS THE TRUE MAGICIAN, THOUGH HIS GNAWING UNCERTAINTY WILL ACT TO MY PAWN'S ADVANTAGE.
BUT STRANGE WILL WIN EVENTUALLY. THUS, I MUST SEEK OTHERS TO STRIVE IN MY STEAD--UNTIL I AM READY TO SMOTHER THE WORLD IN THE EMBRACE OF THE GREAT FEAR.
THE DWELLER TURNS FROM THE SCENE OF EARTHLY CARNAGE AND STALKS THE DANK HALLS OF FEAR UNTIL HE REACHES HIS CASTLE'S UPPERMOST PARAPET.

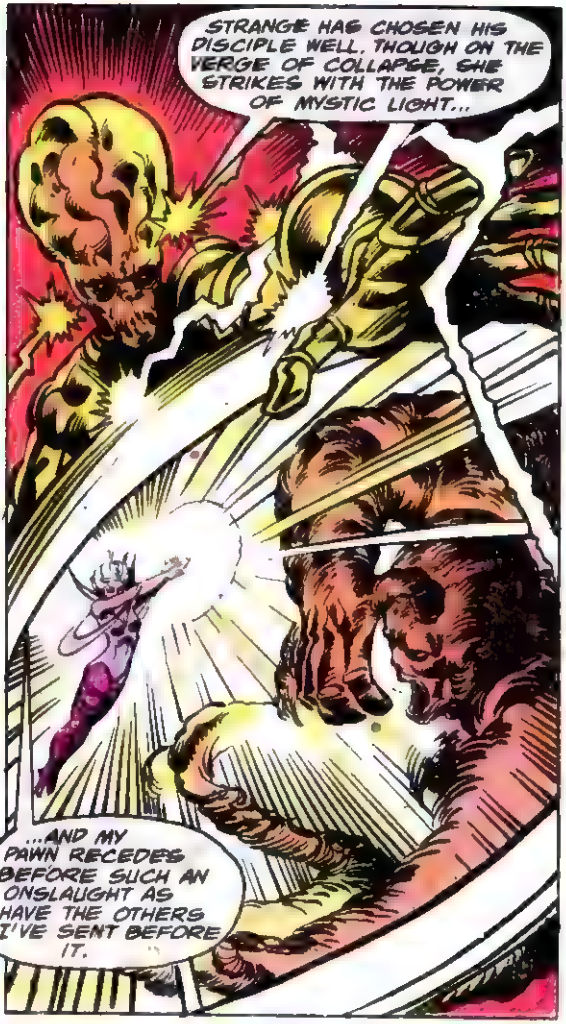

LIKE THE SOUND OF COUNTLESS CHAINS GRATING UPON COLD STONE FLOORS, HIS VOICE PIERCES THE VEIL OF A THOUSAND DIMENSIONS.
FOLLOW ME--THE GREAT FEAR SEEKS ALLIES IN ITS WAR WITH THE MORTAL PLANE. ALLY YOURSELVES WITH THE DWELLER AND PURSUE A DESTINY OF GREATNESS.
HEED ME--FOR FEAR IS THE KEY.
SOME HESITATE AND REQUEST TIME TO PONDER SUCH A PACT.
OTHERS DISMISS THE NOTION OF AN ALLIANCE WITH A SNARL.
BUT MOST ARE REPELLED BY THE VERY AURA OF THAT GREAT FEAR WHICH ENSHROUDS THE DWELLER LIKE A DARKSOME CLOAK.
DIFFIDENCE, DENIAL --BAH! I SHALL REMEMBER THOSE FACES IN THE FUTURE.
BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION...
LIMAR, WILL YOU SERVE--
SERVE? LIMAR SERVES NONE--SAVE TO FURTHER HER OWN ENDS. AWAY WITH YOU, DWELLER.
AS THE DREAD DORMAMMU'S VILE SISTER FADES FROM VIEW, THE DWELLER'S ETHEREAL SCREEN GLOWS WITH THE IMAGE OF A NEW PROSPECT.

PERHAPS OTHERS HAVE FOOLISHLY SPURNED YOUR OFFER...
AND YOUR NAME, DEMON?
...BUT I ACCEPT IT GLADLY.
I AM LUDI, O DWELLER. I SEEK REVENGE ON MANKIND FOR WRONGS COMMITTED AGAINST ME.
I CRAVE THIS FOR MYSELF--
--AND FOR HIM, MY DEMON BROTHER, NINGAL, WHO WAS FROZEN IN THAT BLOCK OF LAMBENT ENERGY...
...FROZEN BY THE TREACHERY OF THE MORTAL HE HOLDS IN STASIS WITH HIM.
HE IS A MAN CALLED MURDOCH ADAMS, AN ADVENTURER WHO, IN THE PAST, THWARTED MY ACQUISITION OF A FEMALE SACRIFICE AND FORCED ME TO FLEE IN AGONY. *
*WAY BACK IN CHAMBER OF CHILLS #4, FOLKS-- ARCHAIC ALLEN.
ONCE I WAS REVERED-- WORSHIPPED AS A GOD. IN RETURN, I GAVE OF MYSELF TO MEN, IN THE FORM OF GENTLE RAINS AND PLENTIFUL CROPS.
ALL I ASKED WAS AN OCCASIONAL HUMAN BRIDE TO DO MY BIDDING.
THE CHURCH OBJECTED, AND MY WORSHIPPERS WERE SCATTERED, MY SHRINES LEFT IN RUINS. FOR THIS THEY SHALL PAY--
--AND FOR THAT, FOR THE ENDLESS HOURS OF NINGAL'S SUFFERING.

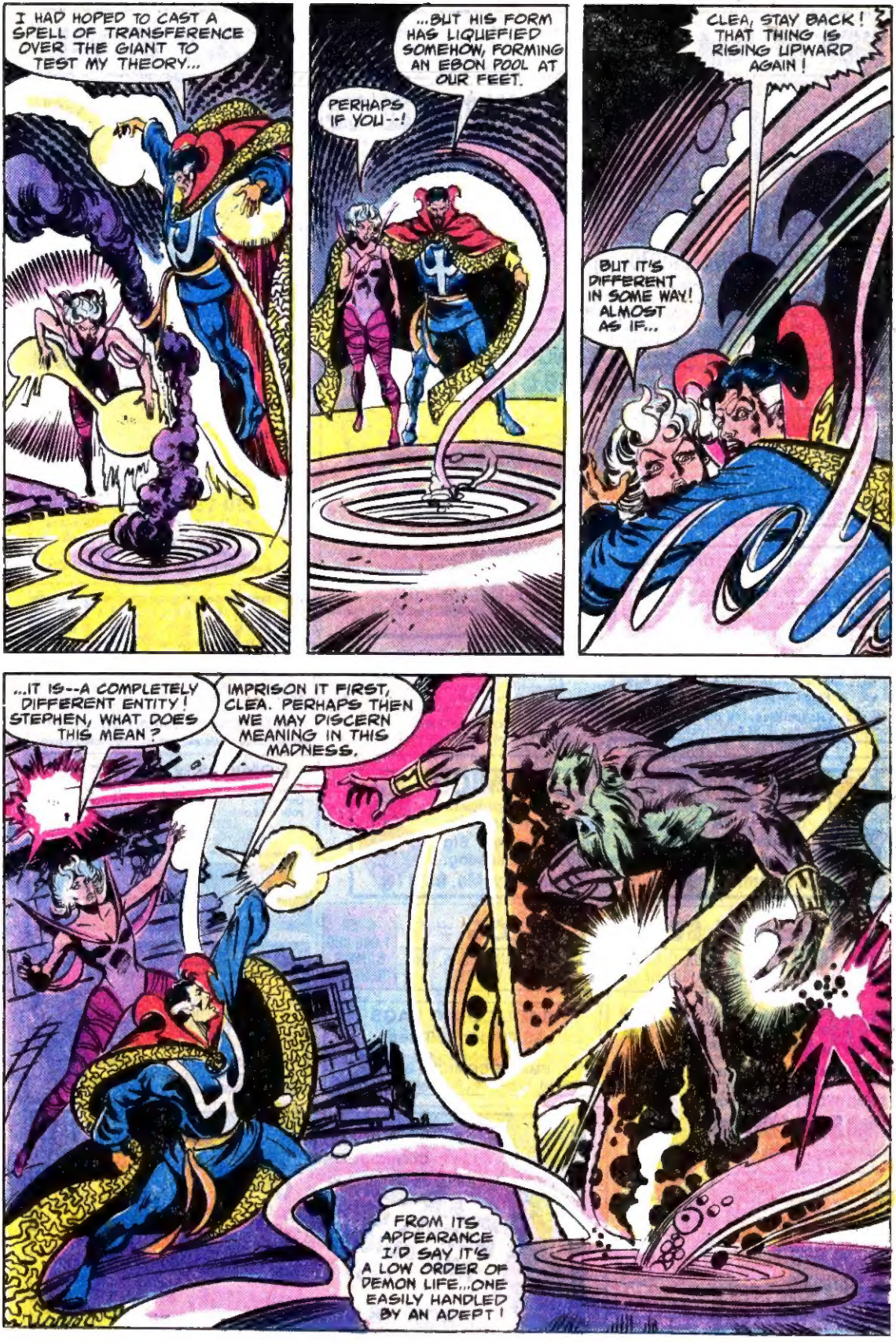
COMPOSE YOURSELF, DEMON. BEFORE ACCEPTING THIS OFFER OF AID, I SHALL PROBE THE MINDS OF THOSE TWO--
--AND DETERMINE IF THEY, ALSO, MAY BE BROUGHT INTO MY SERVICE.
Y-YES, GREAT DWELLER.


THIS IS BEYOND ALL IMAGINING! IN THE PERSON OF THIS MORTAL, MURDOCH ADAMS--
--FATE HAS DELIVERED INTO MY HANDS THE PERFECT TOOL FOR THWARTING STRANGE INDEFINITELY.
I SHALL REDUCE THE MEDDLING MYSTIC TO MINDLESS IMPOTENCE.

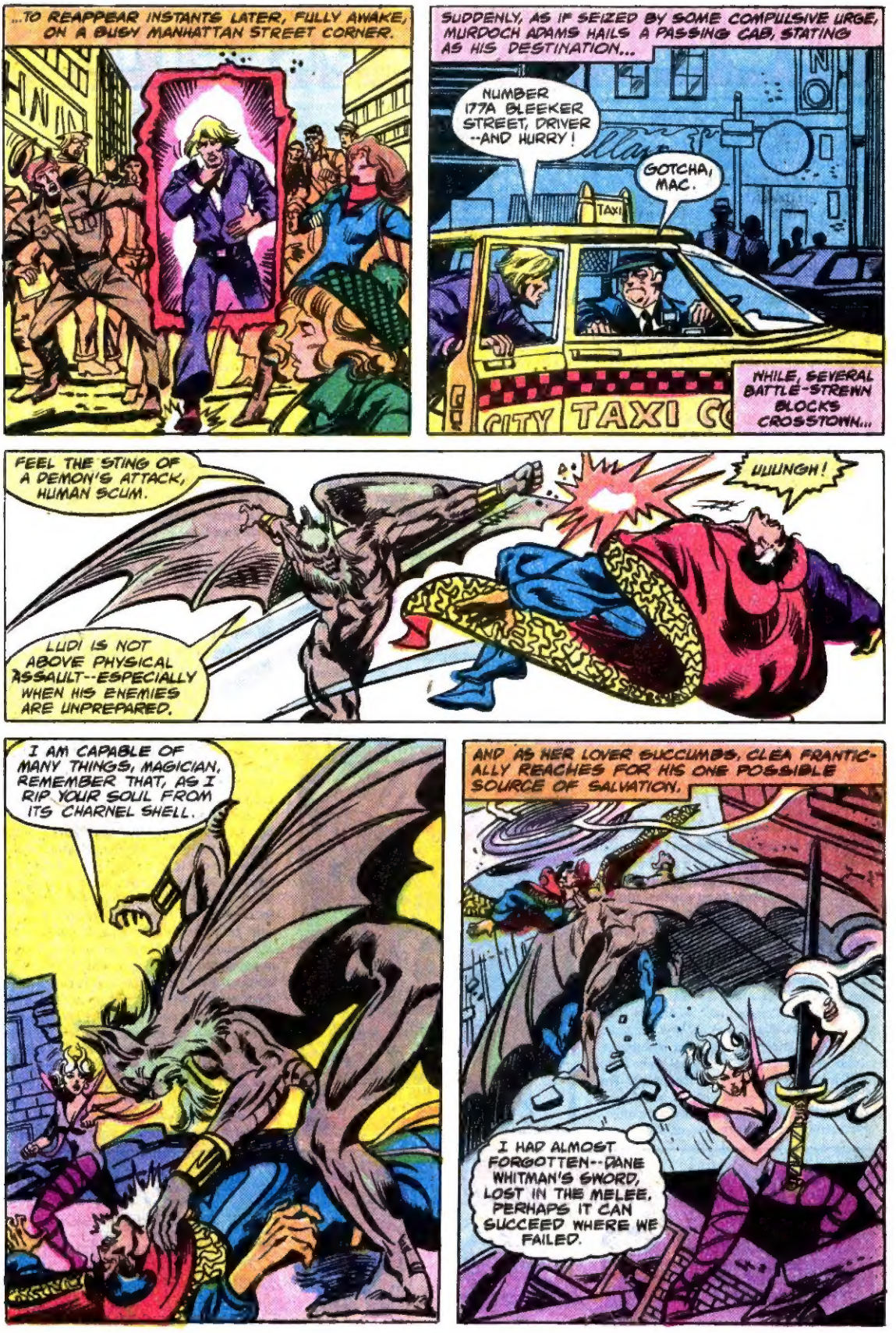

AND SPEAKING OF THE MUCH SET-UPON SORCERER...
THOUGH OUR SPELLS HAVE PREVENTED THE CREATURE FROM REACHING THE FLEEING MOB BELOW...
...CLEA HAS COME UNDER ATTACK. SHE IS BEING ENGULFED, SMOTHERED IN ITS GRASP!
SMOKE--TOO MUCH...I AM BEING OVERCOME. BUT I CANNOT ALLOW STEPHEN TO STRUGGLE ALONE. I MUST GO ON.


STRANGE HAS CHOSEN HIS DISCIPLE WELL, THOUGH ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE, SHE STRIKES WITH THE POWER OF MYSTIC LIGHT...
...AND MY PAWN RECEDES BEFORE SUCH AN ONSLAUGHT AS HAVE THE OTHERS I'VE SENT BEFORE IT.

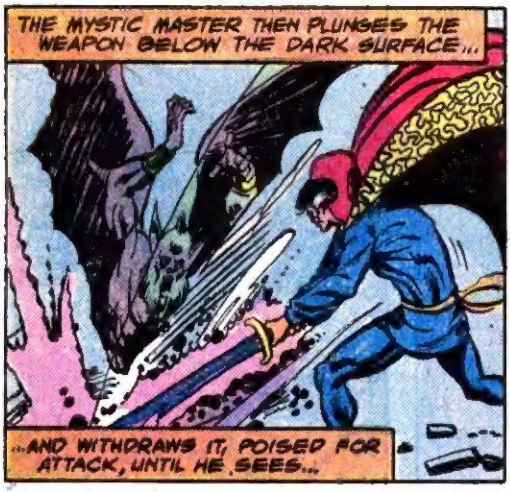
PREPARE YOURSELF, DEMON--MY THRALL FALTERS.
THE TASK HAS FALLEN TO YOU. AND SHOULD YOU ACT IN MY SERVICE, I WILL FREE YOUR BROTHER FROM HIS IMPRISONMENT.
I AM READY.
THEN I SEND YOU TO EARTH, FILLED WITH ALL THE POWER YOU MAY ABSORB...
...THE POWER TO CLAIM VENGEANCE LONG DENIED --AND PERHAPS MUCH, MUCH MORE.
WE HAVE WON, DARLING. SOMEHOW, I SENSED THAT LIGHT WOULD PROVE ITS UNDOING.
YES, LIGHT--LIGHT! CLEA, DO YOU REMEMBER THE TWO SEWER WORKERS WHO WERE TRANSFORMED INTO CREATURES OF A SORT*...
...THEY, TOO, RETREATED BEFORE THE LIGHT OF NIRVALON. PERHAPS THIS CREATURE IS MERELY ANOTHER MANIFESTATION OF THE SAME FORCE.
AND IF SO, THEN THIS BEING IS THE TRANS-MOGRIFIED FORM OF THE MAN WHO ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AT THE VENDOR'S STAND.
*SEE DR. STRANGE #30 --ARCHIVIST ALLEN.

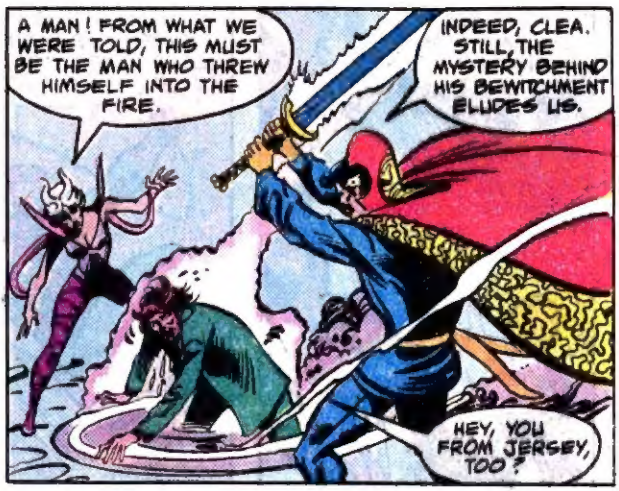

I HAD HOPED TO CAST A SPELL OF TRANSFERENCE OVER THE GIANT TO TEST MY THEORY...
...BUT HIS FORM HAS LIQUEFIED SOMEHOW, FORMING AN EBON POOL AT OUR FEET.
PERHAPS IF YOU--!
CLEA, STAY BACK! THAT THING IS RISING UPWARD AGAIN!
BUT IT'S DIFFERENT IN SOME WAY! ALMOST AS IF...
...IT IS--A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ENTITY! STEPHEN, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
IMPRISON IT FIRST, CLEA. PERHAPS THEN WE MAY DISCERN MEANING IN THIS MADNESS.
FROM ITS APPEARANCE I'D SAY IT'S A LOW ORDER OF DEMON LIFE...ONE EASILY HANDLED BY AN ADEPT!

BY HOGGOTH! MY SPELLS PASS THROUGH THE DEMON HARMLESSLY!
AND UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSOR FROM THE POOL, THE BLINDING LIGHT IS INEFFECTIVE AGAINST HIM.
BUT THE TWO FIENDS MUST HAVE A CONNECTION-- THEY MUST.
IN HIS SHADOWY REALM, THE DWELLER LAUGHS DEEPLY.
YOUR ATTEMPTS TO UNRAVEL THE TANGLED SKEIN ARE ADMIRABLE, STRANGE.
BUT NOW A NEW PLAYER MAKES HIS ENTRANCE TO FURTHER BEFUDDLE YOU.
AT THE DWELLER'S COMMAND, BOLTS OF ELEMENTAL FURY STRIKE THE STASIS CYLINDER, SHATTERING IT...
...AND THE FIGURE OF NINGAL TUMBLES OUT--ALIVE, THOUGH UNCONSCIOUS.
WHILE THE HUMAN OCCUPANT BLINKS OUT OF THE TIMELESS NETHER-WORLD...


...TO REAPPEAR INSTANTS LATER, FULLY AWAKE, ON A BUSY MANHATTAN STREET CORNER.
SUDDENLY, AS IF SEIZED BY SOME COMPULSIVE URGE, MURDOCH ADAMS HAILS A PASSING CAB, STATING AS HIS DESTINATION...
NUMBER 177A BLEEKER STREET, DRIVER --AND HURRY!
GOTCHA, MAC.
TAXI
CITY TAXI
WHILE, SEVERAL BATTLE-STREWN BLOCKS CROSSTOWN...
FEEL THE STING OF A DEMON'S ATTACK, HUMAN SCUM.
UUUUNGH!
LUDI IS NOT ABOVE PHYSICAL ASSAULT--ESPECIALLY WHEN HIS ENEMIES ARE UNPREPARED.
I AM CAPABLE OF MANY THINGS, MAGICIAN. REMEMBER THAT, AS I RIP YOUR SOUL FROM ITS CHARNEL SHELL.
AND AS HER LOVER SUCCUMBS, CLEA FRANTICALLY REACHES FOR HIS ONE POSSIBLE SOURCE OF SALVATION.
I HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN--DANE WHITMAN'S SWORD, LOST IN THE MELEE, PERHAPS IT CAN SUCCEED WHERE WE FAILED.

GLOWING WITH MERLIN-BIRTHED MAGICKS BEYOND EVEN THE NEWLY ACQUIRED POWER OF LUDI, THE SWORD FINDS ITS MARK.
LUDI'S HURT--MUST GRAB THE SWORD HILT AS IT PASSES!




A MAN! FROM WHAT WE WERE TOLD, THIS MUST BE THE MAN WHO THREW HIMSELF INTO THE FIRE.
INDEED, CLEA. STILL, THE MYSTERY BEHIND HIS BEWITCHMENT ELUDES US.
HEY, YOU FROM JERSEY, TOO?

PLEASE, YOU MUST LET ME IN! YOUR MASTER IS THE ONLY MAN ON EARTH WHO CAN HELP ME!
EH--WHO?
PLEASE--I MUST SEE DOCTOR STEPHEN SANDERS!

B-BUT THERE IS NO STEPHEN SANDERS!
ETERNITY HIMSELF ERASED MANKIND'S MEMORY OF THE MASTER'S FORMER IDENTITY. HOW COULD THIS MAN KNOW OF IT?!

NEXT: THE MAN WHO KNEW STEPHEN SANDERS!